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ABSTRACT

Faced with an enrollment decline of over 50 percent since 1962, the board of the public school system in Seattle (Washington) decided in 1981 to close 18 of the district's 112 schools. This report details the decade-long process that led to this decision, treating in particular the changing relationships among the school district, the city, and concerned citizens. Drawing on interviews with local city and school officials and community representatives, and on examinations of the records of the period, the researchers found that the process of school district policy-making on facility utilization had been fraught with many difficulties and had undergone many changes. The roles of the school board and citizen groups in obtaining, developing, and utilizing relevant information changed considerably over the years. Despite an outcome that failed to satisfy all participants fully, the policy development process did lead to some positive results and suggested to the researchers ways in which the many problems raised by massive retrenchment can be overcome. (Author/MLF)

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PUBLIC POLICY PAPER NO. 16

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MANAGING THE POLITICS OF DECLINE:

SCHOOL CLOSURES IN SEATTLE

by

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MANAGING THE POLITICS OF DECLINE:

SCHOOL CLOSURES IN SEATTLE

On February 11, 1981, the Seattle School Board voted to close eighteen of the district's 112 schools, fourteen of them by June 1981. Since 1962, Seattle schools had lost more than half their children and this action by the board culminated years of debate over how the district should respond to declining enrollments, rising costs, and growing constraints on its financial base. The debate was carried on in the midst of tensions created by unmet public expectations for the schools, significant changes in the student population, continuing uncertainties about school funding, and the devisive effects of a massive desegregation program carried out without a court order.

Seattle is not alone in struggling with retrenchment. While the problem is national in scope, there is no national policy. Few guides can be found in the literature documenting the experience of districts facing the practical problems involved in managing a declining public system. Closing schools is one response to the need to cutback. But few decisions district boards and administrators make stir so much public reaction.

In making closure decisions, school districts must consider impacts on various city government activities, housing and desegregation patterns and the vitality of local school neighborhoods. The process of decisionmaking is complex when, as is the case in most localities, cities and school districts are separate jurisdictions. Intergovernmental relations can become strained and destructive when the decisions of one jurisdiction affect the actions of another. The management issues involved in decisions to close schools cannot be disengaged from the political ones. In addition to intergovernmental policy questions, attitudes of the public in general, and affected neighborhoods in particular, play a critical role.

Traditional educational management tools are not adequate to handle these problems. School closure is not simply a problem of redrawing attendance zones and reallocating staff. It incites neighborhood political opposition, it breaks down existing ties between school and community, and it affects the social life of cities. The problem of school closure challenges the insularity of the public schools as a self-contained unit of local government. It threatens the control of school administrators and school boards over resource allocation decisions. It exposes districts to legal action, press attacks and political pressure more than almost any other issue aside from major desegregation efforts. School closure decisions are important to study because they test the boundary between politics and management and between the school system and the local government and community in which it resides.

Most educational decisionmakers have not been prepared to handle the complexity of these technical and political problems surrounding closure. This is true in part because their own training and experience took place in periods of incremental growth. At the same time, parents and others affected by cutbacks in educational services are, in many cities, better organized and more politically sophisticated, largely because of the experiences they gained while bargaining over the expanding resources during those same periods of growth. Cutback decisions are devisive, politically charged and technically complex.

This study chronicles the debate in Seattle over closures during the last ten years. It documents the positions and perceptions of various actors in the controversy in an attempt to provide a clear picture of the final decision made in February 1981. We wanted to find out what the issues were, who played significant roles and what outside factors affected the outcome of the decision.

Study Methodology

The method used in this study relied heavily on interviews with the people

who had been most involved in the debate over the years. We talked extensively with school administrators, board members, parents who led battles to save particular schools, and representatives of citizen organizations who had mounted long term attacks on the district's process for making closure decisions. We listened to city officials and state legislators and spent considerable time with the newspeople who had covered the story over time. We read statements, official district and city planning documents, citizen position papers, newspaper articles. We sat in on school board meetings and public hearings, city council and legislative hearings, and meetings of variously concerned community groups.

The questions we asked of these formal and informal participants in the process focused on a variety of technical and political issues. In talking to school people we probed to identify policy and management problems. What was the relative weight given to technical and political criteria in making closure decisions? How clearly were they differentiated? What kind of information was available to all parties and how was it used? What did school people (and affected city people) perceive as the constraints under which they had to work? What options to closure was the district considering at different stages of the debate? What was the relative impact of various outside factors on the argument, particularly desegregation activities, district financial crises, employee relations, legislative action, and local political pressures? What individuals and organizations had an influence on the way the decision turned out, particularly organized citizen efforts? What factors had the greatest influence in final decisions?

Over the course of the interviews we came away with a detailed, if messy, picture of what happened. We had a sense of how the nature of the debate changed during the years in response to the pressure of rapidly declining enrollment and increasing financial constraint. We have focused on the change in the

role of citizen groups as they became increasingly sophisticated in efforts to influence the district particularly in the way they used information and exerted political pressure.

This report of our research looks first at some unique characteristics in Seattle that led us to choose it as our site. Then we look briefly at the national picture of responces to declining enrollments. Next we look at Seattle's situation in terms of enrollment and excess space. We trace various actions of the district at different stages and look at the activities of local government and the community in response to those actions. For perspective at this point, we take a brief look at what has happened in Seattle since the February 1981 decision. Although we had already finished our research, we believe it will be instructive to give a cursory description of the way the Seattle school district has implemented its newly adopted policies in regard to management of excess school space.

In our concluding remarks, we discuss some of the issues in the politics and management of decline and in the use of surplus space. We point to some of the lessons learned from the Seattle experience that might be appropriate for other districts facing this problem.

Seattle as a Site

In addition to proximity and our base of knowledge, we chose Seattle because the school district has seen a dramatic decline in enrollment in the past ten years. During that period, however, Seattle schools have generally maintained local public support and a relatively diverse student population.

In addition, the state of Washington enjoyed a relatively healthy economy during the early stages of declining enrollment. With Boeing's boom strengthening the general economy and a very active real estate market adding to school revenues, Washington schools were not being hurt the way those in other, more

economically depressed states were. In addition, the state assumed full funding for basic education in its public schools following court and legislative action in the late seventies. Although Seattle has not fared particularly well in comparison to other state districts because of the burden of unmet costs and a concentration of students with special needs, compared to many other urban systems it enjoys adequate and stable funding. Seattle has a history of passing high local levies and receiving adequate support from the state.

As with other urban school districts, the racial composition of Seattle's schools has changed in the last decade and a half. In 1965, 85% of the school population was white; in 1981, the minority population was 40.3% with an increasing percentage of non-Black and non-English speaking students. In the last two years it has experienced an influx of Asian refugees. Despite these numbers and the loss of white students in the system, Seattle is still a city where middle-class children attend the public schools. Seattle has not had a tradition of heavy private school attendance. A recent study indicates, however, that the number of students attending private schools has risen to 25% compared to 5% in the surrounding King County area (Hispanic Planning Task Force Report, 1980, p. 25).

Seattle has an unusually high proportion of pre-1939 housing still in use that has made it eligible for substantial amounts of block grant assistance. Because the stock is in good condition, middle-class families live in the city and much of the block grant money went into redeveloping older, single-family neighborhoods. With housing prices escalating, however, these older houses are being bought more and more by single owners or by working couples with no children. Recent population statistics show that approximately one-quarter of the households in the city have children. Later we will look at some of the political implications of middle-class families being in a public school system.

Many of the school buildings in the city are old -- the oldest still in

use was built in 1892 and a majority of them are over 50 years old. A number have been designated as historic landmarks by the city's Historic Landmarks Board. Traditionally, school buildings have been well maintained in Seattle but in the last six years (following a levy loss) maintenance has been deferred.

Seattle is a city with strong neighborhood identification and the public school, particularly the elementary school, often provides a focus for community activity and support. Neighborhood councils play an important role in a variety of political and allocation decisions in city government.

Finally, there is a strong, healthy history of citizen participation in Seattle schools. Most of this involvement has been supportive both at the local school level and in terms of district activities. However, there is an independent streak that runs through state politics in general. Both the state and the city have seen successful intervention and redirection of mission and policy by organized citizen groups on issues affecting the environment, public disclosure and education.

The National Scene

Nationwide, elementary public school enrollment peaked at 37.1 million in 1969, up from the 1950 level of 22 million. In this same period, secondary enrollment more than doubled, from 6.5 million in 1950 to nearly 15 million in 1970 and reached a peak enrollment of 15.8 in 1976. During the 1970s, however, elementary enrollment started to decline rapidly and unexpectedly. Projections made in the mid-1960s had estimated a 1980 elementary enrollment of between 37 and 46 million, and a high school enrollment of 15 to 17 million. Even the low projection of 37 million was considerably above the actual 1980 elementary enrollment of 29 million (R. Davis and G. Lewis, 1978; E. Fiske, 11-11-79; S. Reed, 11-11-79).

Current national estimates suggest that elementary enrollment will continue

to drop as low as 28 million by 1984 when there will be a slow rise or a dramatic increase depending on which projections one chooses to follow. For example, one estimate projects elementary enrollments at 29.9 million in 1985 and 33.9 million in 1990; high school enrollments are projected at 13 million in 1985 and 11.9 million in 1990. There was a 5% increase in births in 1979, which some demographers suggest may signal a second baby boom, or echo of the postwar baby boom. This upsurge in births represents the postponed childbearing of the baby boom contingent. No one can say with certainty how large this echo is likely to be, and the lack of certainty complicates long-range planning (E. Fiske, 11-11-79; S. Reed, 11-11-79).*

To further complicate matters, the enrollment decline has not been uniform throughout the nation nor even within individual school districts. Birth rates vary considerably according to race and socioeconomic status, and local enrollments are also contingent on the relative balance of in-and-out migration. While the empirical evidence is unclear, school policies with respect to academic standards, closure, and desegregation may themselves contribute to the abandonment of the public schools, particularly by the increasing numbers of dual career families who can afford private school tuitions.

These changes are occurring at a time when confidence in the public schools is threatened, state revenue sources are under attack from those seeking to limit or roll back taxes or expenditures, and the national administration is

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*A recent Washington state report on population trends points to the fact that in 1980 there were 25,000 more pre-school age children in Washington state than there were in 1970. The number of births continue to climb each year. The 70,820 births recorded in Washington between April 1980 and April 1981 was the eighth consecutive year that total births increased, according to the state Office of Financial Management. The report predicts that public school enrollment will rise from 729,573 students in the 1979-80 school year to a projected 839,700 in 1989-90, an increase of 110,127. The big jump is not expected to occur until after 1985-86 when the large number of children being born now enter the educational system.

reducing federal assistance for education. About half the funds for operating school districts come from the state and federal governments, and is tied to student enrollments. Declining enrollment means declining aid, although many fixed costs cannot be reduced evenly in proportion to enrollment declines.

Most of today's school administrators began their careers in the growth era of the 1950s and 1960s. The challenge facing educators then were the need for more teachers and classrooms to meet the rising enrollments, and more efficient schooling to counter the technical superiority posed by USSR's 1957 launching of Sputnik. The 1959 Conant Report had found that American high schools were too small to provide an adequate technical education, and called for larger, more comprehensive schools. School district consolidations, advocated by educators on the grounds of efficiency, reduced the number of districts from 84,000 in 1950 to 40,000 by 1960, and about 20,000 by 1980.

The management tasks and the environment for decisions confronting the school administrator have changed markedly. Instead of expansion and growth, school administrators now must oversee the contraction of facilities and staff, along with declining enrollments. Money is becoming increasingly scarce. Districts have little room to maneuver between the fixed costs associated with facility maintenance, rising costs of energy, and seniority systems which preserve the jobs of the most highly paid personnel and preclude recruitment of lower-cost, more recently trained staff. Funding of facilities improvements through bond issues face the dual problems of high interest rates and the apathy and resistance of an increasingly childless electorate angered by their loss of purchasing power.

Citizen groups reflecting a range of interests and often at odds with one another, now expect to have a say in school policy, and are prepared to delay or halt school actions through confrontation or court intervention, if necessary.

Federal mandates have increased the demands on schools to provide special services to particularly needy groups -- the handicapped and non-English speakers for example -- without providing the resources for meeting the requirements.

Box Score on Enrollment and Closure

Seattle's school enrollment reached its peak in 1962 with 99,326 students. At that time there were 109 schools and many portables in the district. By February 1981 when the school board voted to close eighteen out of 112 facilities, the population was approximately 46,000.

The 1960s present a complicated picture of facility construction, closure, replacement and reuse. A bond issue early in the decade authorized the district to construct two new high schools. A second bond issue in 1966 allowed for renovation of a number of facilities, the construction of a middle school and the replacement of seven elementary schools. Some district property was transferred to the newly formed community college system in the late 1960s and a number of buildings were closed to regular school use but were retained for special programs and certain administrative services. During that period, from 1962 until 1969, student population declined by approximately 10,000.

In 1971, the district closed two elementaries to regular use. In 1974 with district enrollment down to 66,421, seven more schools were identified for closure. Following strong political reaction, the board withdrew the closure list and agreed to postpone action. In 1976, the board voted to close five schools but irregularities in process put the case of closure into the court which ruled that while the district had the authority to close schools, it had not abided by an environmental impact statement process. The five schools were ordered reopened. In 1978, two elementary schools were closed. Five more schools were identified and closed on a "temporary" basis in 1979.

Many portables were closed during this period cutting back on the district's surplus space. By 1980, the final tally indicates there were 112 schools operating regular programs in the district and 48,415 students.

In the decade from 1971 until 1981, when enrollment had dropped by approximately 34,000 students, nine schools were actually closed. Tremendous controversy and considerable time, energy and money had been poured into the closure question by Seattle's board, administration, city government and citizenry. With such a dramatic drop in student enrollment, why had only nine buildings been closed?

Patterns of District Action in Seattle

1960-1970: Expanding Classrooms and Declining Enrollments. In keeping with post-war interests in comprehensive community planning, the Seattle school district and the city of Seattle Planning Commission undertook a joint study to provide data for future facility planning. The aim of that study, completed in 1962, was to estimate the number and geographical distribution of students to be accommodated in the succeeding 15 years, and to plan for the necessary modification of school facilities. The report, A Guide for School Planning, projected a stable enrollment and, based on this data, the district presented a capital improvement bond issue for new construction and the upgrading of a number of existing facilities. The bond issue failed in 1965, but passed the following year. As actual enrollments continued to decline, the district retained an outside consulting firm, URS Research Company of San Mateo, California, to prepare a new plan. As planning guidelines, the board adopted a policy to move toward a K-4, 5-8, 9-12 grade configuration to replace the then predominant K-7, 8-9, 10-12 pattern.

There was virtually no attempt to involve public discussion in planning or very little effort to identify public consequences of facility changes.

1970-1975: Technical Rationality and Facility Assessment. The URS study was accepted by the board in 1970. In addition to identifying growing concerns about excess space, the report also stressed the necessity to replace or upgrade some of the older facilities. The criteria used by the URS study team included: the adequacy and flexibility of teaching and auxiliary space; age, expandability, and cost of maintenance and rehabilitation of the site; community factors related to land-use capability, and proximity to transportation and other public facilities. A second screening factored in enrollment and staff projections and educational assumptions.

The final report assessed all of the Seattle facilities, primarily on the basis of these physical considerations, and made recommendations to remodel, demolish, and replace or close specific schools. It did not give Seattle good marks on the condition of its buildings. The report called for the "discontinuance" of eleven schools -- nine elementary, one middle and one high school by 1985.

In 1971, the district had closed two elementary schools on the discontinuance list. A strong public outcry came with the closure of one of them, Interlake, but it was caused at least in part because its closure was tied to the district's desegregation efforts of that time.

Early in 1974, the district staff at the direction of the board, identified seven more schools for closure. They were selected by neighborhood, primarily on the basis of the current amount of excess space they contained, although the other URS planning criteria of physical condition were taken into account. The closure list stimulated an immediate response from affected neighborhood groups. These groups were able to question successfully the validity of data upon which staff recommendations were based. Neither board nor staff could show an underlying rationale for selecting those seven schools and exempting

other potential candidates for closure. Citizen groups argued in a series of public hearings that the board was ignoring the role of the elementary schools in maintaining the vitality of residential neighborhoods.

This argument fit very well with the planning emphasis of the City of Seattle's Department of Community Development which stressed neighborhood preservation. During the expansion phases of the 1950s and the 1960s, the district and the city had often worked closely together to coordinate the location and utilization of school facilities. This approach spoke to the need to relate population shifts and new construction to traffic and transportation patterns, and coordinate use of playground facilities.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, however, the city's planning approach changed markedly to reflect a renewed interest in neighborhood preservation and a far greater sensitivity to the requirements and dynamics of citizen participation. The lessons learned by the city and by citizens from Model Cities and community development experiences began to permeate the school neighborhood controversy. Twenty-two neighborhoods were offered the opportunity to seek block grant funds for neighborhood improvement projects, and this process strengthened the school and community-based citizen council. To many of these groups, the threat of school closure seemed at odds with an official city position to preserve and strengthen neighborhoods.

At this point, the mayor and members of the city council joined the fray attacking the district's closure plan. Coalitions began forming among neighborhood groups and community organizations that continued to work together over the next seven years of the debate. The power of city government had been called in by the community to do battle with the district. This was the first time there had been a conscious, concerted, political response to the closure issue. Stunned by an unexpectedly strong public reaction, the board backed off,

withdrew the closure list, and agreed to postpone further action for two years, directing the superintendent to undertake further study of the problem.

1974-1977: Studying the Problem. Chastened by the intensity of opposition to the 1974 closure plan, the district initiated and cooperated in several concurrent research and planning efforts to assess the impact of closures on neighborhoods and to develop a more defensible process for determining which schools might be closed in the future. The leading effort was a study funded by the National Institute of Education and jointly sponsored by the district, the city, and the Joint Advisory Commission on Education (JACE), an appointed citizen group that advises the district and the city on education issues affecting both jurisdictions.

The study was conducted in two phases. The first dealt with the relationship of an elementary school to its neighborhood, specifically examining the relationship of the neighborhood schools to the health of neighborhoods. A grant extension provided for a second phase that explored joint city and school district goals, policies and programs relating to racial balance in city schools and neighborhoods.

The goals of the NIE-sponsored study were ambitious. They were to be accomplished by examining population and land-use trends, school enrollment changes, residential property values, crime and fire rates, school levy support, and "quality of life" before and after closure. Neighborhoods in which school closures had occurred were to be compared with matched and presumably comparable neighborhoods where no closures were contemplated. Information was gathered on neighborhood perceptions of schools and attitudes about possible closures; minority and majority population shifts, public housing policies and real estate marketing practices, community use of school facilities, and the legal powers and responsibilities of the district and the city in implementing racial

integration, were also studied.

The impact study design was burdened from the start with goals which the methodology and data were unable to satisfy. A major constraint was the fact that there weren't enough closed schools to provide a satisfactory estimate of effects. Of three schools closed in the early seventies, one had been replaced by a new school, and the other two were subsequently converted to other uses, introducing still another significant limitation to the study conclusions. Two schools that had been closed during the 1960s were both still operating with alternative programs. Any "impact" that might be identified could be due to a variety of causes, and the diversity and limited number of experimental and control schools would affect the confidence that could be placed in the findings.

The study did not demonstrate a clear relationship between closure and neighborhood decline, but neither did it rule out the possibility of such a relationship. A carefully worded conclusion stated:

> It was expected that exploring the impacts associated with prior school closures in Seattle would lead to a better understanding of the relationship between elementary schools and their neighborhoods. Some attitudinal and data based findings appear to be closely related. The existence of these limited impacts indicates that an urban elementary school is one factor affecting urban neighborhood vitality (D. Eismann et al., 1976, p. 17).

At the same time the NIE proposal was being written, the superintendent appointed a citizens' group in January 1975 to recommend a process for deciding on future closures. Their report presented to the superintendent and board in September 1975, was a design for future planning. It recommended that staff be appointed to work with a steering committee comprised of citizens and city and district officials to further study the facilities issue. These recommendations were implemented in September 1975. A project director and steering committee were charged with developing what came to be the Facilities Utilization Study (FUS).

As a result of the pressure brought about by the public hearings in the previous closure struggle, the board had agreed there would be no more closures until this facilities utilization study was completed. A three-year moratorium on closures was announced, with the provision that emergency closures might be made but only with a minimum of a one-year notification to the public prior to the actual date of closure.

1976: The District Once Again Tries to Close Schools. A rationale for emergency closures came in 1975 when Seattle voters twice rejected a special levy request resulting in the loss of almost 40% of the district's yearly operating funds. Seattle's school crisis brought into sharp focus a problem that had been plaguing school districts throughout Washington. Over a number of years, the proportion of support for schools provided by the state had been declining, and local districts were being forced to pick up an increasing share of regular operating expenses. Districts were constantly faced with uncertain funding levels, and there was great disparity from district to district in taxing capacity and voter willingness to support levies. The twin problems of instability and inequity came to a climax in the 1975 levy elections throughout the state.

Previous attempts to reform the state's school finance system had been unsuccessful. Following the levy failure in Seattle which resulted in major staff layoffs, the district filed suit against the state charging that it was not fulfilling its constitutional mandate to "make ample provision for basic education." A favorable court opinion created the impetus for legislative reform that included the state's assuming full funding for what the legislature had defined as "basic education." Determination of state support was on the basis of a student-staff ratio, and the legislature through its budget process would decide how much the state would give districts for salary increases. Districts

were limited to a 10% local levy. If local bargaining resulted in a higher percentage increase for staff than the state would pay for, districts would have to depend on other means to generate the funds for negotiated salary increases, such as increasing class size, cutting back on programs, or closing schools.

In 1975 after the levy loss but prior to this reform of the state's school finance system, Seattle was faced with severe financial problems. Despite some budget juggling and a special levy relief package from the legislature, the board perceived the need for further economy measures and so changed its decision to defer closures. In March 1976, the board asked the staff to recommend five schools for "temporary closure" although board members acknowledged that the closures would likely be permanent. Staff were again directed to select the schools on the basis of excess space and the board voted to close those five schools.

During the meeting, one of the board members proposed the substitution of University Heights elementary school -- not on the closure list proposed by staff -- for Wedgwood which was on the list. This move by the board created tremendous reaction from the public, primarily because the citizens from the affected neighborhood had not been notified prior to the meeting. Among the effects of this action was agreement on an informal school board rule to defer action on any substantive issue raised for the first time at a meeting.

Wedgwood had been built in 1954 in what was then the rapidly expanding northern part of Seattle housing many of the young baby boom families. By the 1970s, however, enrollments had begun to fall faster in this predominantly white section of the city than in the lower-income central and south parts of Seattle where there was a growing concentration of minorities. The result was continued overcrowding in the older, more dilapidated central area and south Seattle schools, and an excess of space in the newer north end schools.

University Heights is one of the oldest schools in the district built in 1902. It is a large, imposing wood frame building painted with a bright, contrasting color scheme designed by a neighborhood architect. University Heights is near the University of Washington in a commercial area bounded by heavily used streets. Both Wedgwood and University Heights experienced comparable decline in the number of children in their attendance areas. On the surface, the proposal to substitute University Heights for Wedgwood seemed reasonable enough to the board which now contained three recently elected new members. The response from the University Heights community, however, was swift and decisive. They filed suit against the district in April 1976, charging the board should have prepared an Environmental Impact Statement prior to their closure decision.

When the suit was heard in August, the judge offered the district a compromise. Under the proposed compromise, the district would be permitted to proceed with the closure of three of the schools if they agreed to allow University Heights and High Point to remain open. The board rejected the plan and the judge ruled that while the district did have the authority to close schools, it must comply with the provisions of the State Environmental Policy Act of 1971 (SEPA) by preparing an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) whenever a school was to be closed. The five schools were ordered reopened, and the district was advised to follow the EIS process in the future.*

By 1976, then, the board and the administration had twice tried to close schools and twice been rebuffed. The impetus behind both failures was a strong, neighborhood-based citizen response. Having traditionally relied on their

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*Ironically, because the court order applied only to the Seattle schools, it remains the only district in the state required to follow the EIS procedure. The district has consistently supported unsuccessful legislative attempts to exempt school closures from EIS requirements.

technical experts, the district was finding out two things. Citizens were beginning to question successfully those technicians and they were also beginning to understand the impact of organized political action. The board, by its stop-and-go approach, was signaling a basic inability to handle the neighborhood-based politics of school closure. The district administration persisted in the view that school closures were essentially a problem of building logistics -- adjusting building capacity to shifts in enrollment without regard for citizen responses. Both the board and the administration appeared to be reluctant to acknowledge the implications of school closure decisions for the broader political environment of the city.

1976-1979: Other Things on Their Minds. The Facilities Utilization Study, commissioned by the superintendent and the board in December 1975, was completed in November 1977. It was a carefully researched and well-written document which addressed a variety of concerns relating to closures. It proposed new standards for school space requirements, an optimal enrollment size for each type of school, offered new enrollment projections, and identified a variety of joint use and reuse options.* It did not, however, identify specific schools for closure, replacement or upgrading. Instead, it recommended that these decisions be deferred until after the district's desegregation plan had been adopted. It further recommended that a facilities plan be developed jointly by district staff and citizens.

Reflecting on the district's experience with closures, the report stated, "If one lesson has been learned over the past few years it is this: the community and city must be involved in school planning efforts" (Seattle Public

*Under joint use, a facility is used primarily for school purposes, with some portions available for use by others during and after the school day; with reuse, an entire facility is rented or leased for another use.

Schools, 1977, p. 2). It specifically suggested that facilities planning be carried out on an area-by-area basis rather than attempting to proceed on a district-wide basis. In this way, the concerns of specific neighborhoods were less likely to be overlooked.

University Heights, a neighborhood determined not to be overlooked and always alert to renewed attacks on its school building, obtained city block grant funding to study the feasibility of joint use in the excess space not required for the school program. The report prepared by a local architect and urban design firm suggested that a major impediment to joint use was zoning restrictions, since many schools were located in residential areas. (Special legislation enacted by the Seattle City Council in 1980 inserted an extended use provision in the city's zoning ordinance allowing greater flexibility in the use of schools and ensuring community involvement in determining appropriate uses for that excess space.) The report also demonstrated the marketability of space in a remodeled University Heights School under a range of educational use options.

City politics intruded in the debate. The current mayor was a strong opponent of school closure. In a hotly contested election in November 1977, he had run as the "neighborhood" candidate while charging that his opponent was the candidate of downtown business and the developers. Ironically, his opponent had until the election directed the city's Department of Community Development. He had played a key role in efforts to decentralize certain city operations working extensively with community organizations to develop joint use programs between the city and the district.

The mayor, a former television commentator, had run as a grassroots candidate* and was perceived as the nonpolitician, nonbureaucrat "outsider" (as compared

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*The Seattle mayor's race is nonpartisan.

to his "city hall" opponent) who would protect neighborhoods and citizen interests. His election came a year after Washington had elected a nonpolitician "outsider," Dixy Lee Ray, as governor, and the country had elected Jimmy Carter as president. Once elected, the mayor was under considerable pressure to support aggressively the interests of the groups that had elected him. Statements affirming the importance of schools as the core of strong vital neighborhoods brought him into conflict with the prevailing attitude of the superintendent and the board. These statements appeared to represent an effective amalgam of political strategy and an honest search by the city for alternatives to massive school closures.

During the 1977-78 school year, with the exception of an extensive seismic survey, district facility planning efforts were at a low ebb. In March 1978, however, the district proposed closure of five more schools. Following legal SEPA requirements, an EIS was completed and public hearings held resulting in the closure of two more elementary schools -- Fairview and Hawthorne.

In the summer and fall of 1978, school closure was not the prime public issue, however, The district was concentrating all its resources on the development and implementation of a comprehensive desegregation program. On December 14, 1978, the board decided to desegregate its schools by mandatory busing without a court order. The Seattle Plan, which grouped schools in pairs and triads for compulsory busing, was developed with the involvement of a number of citizen organizations, including the Municipal League, Chamber of Commerce, Urban League, and League of Women Voters. The board's decision was prompted in part by the threat of a lawsuit by a number of other organizations, including the NAACP, ACLU, and the Council of Churches of Greater Seattle.

A previous system that included mandatory middle school busing, voluntary busing at all levels, and a magnet school program was replaced by an essentially

city-wide two-way mandatory busing plan that assured desegregation of schools in both predominantly minority and white neighborhoods.* The disruption that came as a result of major reassignments of students and staff was still reverberating through the district when the issue of school closure began to surface again. In the desegregation process, the concept of the "neighborhood" school was argued over -- reviled, defended, and redefined. Few students would be attending schools that could be considered "neighborhood" schools in the traditional sense.

In October 1978 the superintendent appointed a broadly constituted 80 member District Planning Commission (DPC) to advise the superintendent as the district developed a long-range facilities plan for the period through 1990. By the end of the 1978 school year, the board, superintendent and staff were convinced that the closure of schools was becoming more imperative each year. Enrollments were continuing to plummet and costs were rising. Maintenance had been deferred on many facilities and the condition of the district's physical plant was deteriorating.

Despite the fact that the District Planning Commission had just been appointed and charged to develop a long-range plan, the board in December 1978 directed staff to once more identify five schools for closure. The five were to be the poorest quality schools in those areas having the most excess space based on student residence.

Again the protest was swift from the affected communities, city officials and members of the DPC. The DPC was angry that this action took place as they were just getting started in their long-range planning effort. Community groups assailed the district for failing to make a convincing case for the potential

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*Currently, the Seattle Plan's future is in doubt because of possible court action that would prohibit the use of state funds for desegregation transportation.

cost savings from closure or the alleged disadvantage of small schools. They charged the district with failure to recognize the impact closure would have on neighborhoods, particularly those that were naturally integrating, and on emerging city housing and land use policies. Outsiders felt with increasing confidence that the district was not exploring the possible range of joint and alternative uses of excess school space for city offices, community or commercial tenants. During late 1978 and early 1979 citizens, city council members, and their analytic staffs criticized the quality of information being generated by the district and the process the district was using to develop criteria for closure decisions. After ten years of grappling with the issue, the district could not say how much would be saved by closing one school.

In the face of strong protest, the board approved the closure of the five schools. A suit was filed to block the closures, but was dismissed for lack of standing. The district followed the EIS requirements carefully and closed the five schools.

The district ran into difficulties as they began leasing the five closed schools. Attention was increasingly focused on the lack of district capacity to manage its property. Critics charged there was no overall sense of direction for management of property, no consistent policies, and only site and situation-specific practices. No individual or office was authorized to respond to requests for space coming from any potential leasee nor to work with community groups to develop appropriate activities using excess school space.

JACE developed a proposal to use city block grant funds to hire a consulting firm charged with policy development and exploration for property management options. R.W. Moss and Associates produced a final report in July 1980 recommending measures consistent with many advocated by city officials and a wide range of community groups. It urged retention of surplus property and an

active short and long-term leasing policy maintaining that leasing over time could provide the district with a steady stream of income rather than the uncertain proceeds of quick sales. The report recommended the hiring of a full-time district property manager. The least desireable alternative was boarding up closed buildings and leaving them unused in the middle of a community with growing costs of maintenance and protection.

1980: The Board Votes to Delay. Between October 1978 and November 1979, the DPC had worked hard to prepare a long-range facilities plan. The Commission worked closely with district staff and sought the recommendations of other community groups. Two major differences between DPC members and district staff concerned the enrollment projections and occupancy standards. In general, staff agreed to follow the DPC's suggestion that they plan for the full range of projected enrollments, but felt the high end of the projections was too optimistic. Similarly, staff argued for a 600-900 enrollment range for middle schools, and 350-650 for elementaries (K-6). DPC members favored the low end of these occupancy standards. Both the DPC and staff were working under a board charge for standard K-6 configuration as advocated by the superintendent. The district staff argued that a standard grade configuration system-wide was an essential prerequisite to matching children and schools for desegregation planning, while the DPC maintained there should be variability in the configuration pattern.

Separate but very similar staff and DPC plans were presented to the superintendent in November 1979. The one word that best characterized the DPC plan was "flexibility." The report stated:

> In making final recommendations to the superintendent, the commission wishes to reemphasize certain points it considers critical to the planning process and implementation:
>
> 1. The need to plan for the full range of the enrollment projections.
> 2. The need for reassessment of individual building capacities.
> 3. The need for serious consideration of joint use. The potential of joint use has not been adequately explored. It is too early for the district to foreclose the possibility of joint use.

4. The need for flexibility in the application of school size standards.
5. The need to plan for a maximum of 300 per grade level for the intermediate school.
6. The need to retain existing sites for potential use in 1990 and beyond.
7. The need to assure that seismic and other safety considerations are adequately addressed. More discussion should take place on the seismic issue. The board has yet to specify its intentions on the level of seismic safety it requires.
8. The need for flexibility in bringing buildings up to code. It is not necessary that all buildings be brought up to current code requirements. On buildings not scheduled for extensive remodeling or additions, expenditures should be limited to less than 50% of the assessed valuation.
9. The need to implement the 1990 facilities plan in a way causing the least disruption to existing schools and programs (District Planning Commission, 11-21-79, p. 1).

An informal coalition of the leadership of several citizen organizations met out of concern that the recommendations of the DPC and other groups would be ignored in the superintendent's final report. All those who attended the series of meetings called to develop consensus positions had many years of experience working with the district and with facility issues. In addition to their citizen concerns, their professional expertise included law, urban planning, policy analysis, economics and finance. These meetings were watched carefully by district staff, the board and city officials.

The members of this informal coalition agreed on the following positions: keep closures to a minimum; retain surplus property; and examine a variety of short- and long-term use and leasing options. This approach, they maintained, would keep disruption to a minimum and ensure maximum flexibility in the system if the dire enrollment projections were not accurate or if they were reversed by positive steps that increased enrollment. The coalition was disturbed that at this point the district had still not hired consultants to carry out the property-management study proposed by JACE and funded by city block grant funds; they were convinced that the study results would affirm their positions. They also believed that the results of the study would point out the real

possibilities for revenue generation through an aggressive property development and management program.* There was strong technical and political support for these coalition positions from the mayor, some city council members and city staff.

In December 1979, following a series of public hearings on the facilities plan, the superintendent presented his recommendations to the board. The plan called for closing 29 schools and replacing eight or nine others by 1990. However, the closures would be phased, with the entire plan reassessed annually to account for actual and newly projected enrollment changes. The recommendation was that one school currently used for offices be closed in 1980-81, and five to seven regular schools in the 1981-82 year. Decisions on subsequent closures would be subject to citizen review and board action.

Among the more innovative features of the plan were proposals for a joint city, district, and private enterprise task force to develop creative uses for surplus school property; a recommendation for a pilot project to induce private daycare operators to locate in schools with a low population; and a "small schools" proposal (originally suggested by JACE and later withdrawn by the superintendent as unrealistic) to permit neighborhood groups to operate schools with less than the minimal enrollment, using non-district community resources. A central component of the superintendent's plan was the upgrading and replacement of deteriorating facilities to be financed through a joint city/district bond issue.

When the superintendent did present his report to the board in December 1979, across-the-board endorsement was voiced by most citywide organizations, including the DPC. There was general agreement that the superintendent's

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*As mentioned earlier, the report which was finally presented to the board in July 1980 by R.W. Moss and Associates did in fact support these positions.

recommendations reflected accurately the concerns and the proposals that had been strongly urged by various groups and individuals. Some neighborhoods did feel, however, that the proposed plan hurt them unduly.

Following another series of hearings, the board met on March 5, 1980, to vote on, and as most observers assumed, adopt the long-range facilities plan. Two unexpected events intervened, however. First, the chairperson of the citizen group that had been advising the district on desegregation planning assailed the uniform K-6 grade configuration on which the superintendent's recommendation was based. The chairperson pointed out that under the K-6 plan some elementary students would have to attend schools outside their neighborhoods one more year than would be required under the K-5 configuration. The K-5 plan would provide equity of movement with some children spending the same number of years in and out of the home neighborhood. He argued that the desegregation plan has been sold to citizens on the basis of equity, even though it would mean the closure of more schools if the board maintained its standard of 350 students per school. (A K-5 school would have one less grade, i.e., sixth grade, to help meet that requirement.)

Second, at one of the hearings, a parent who was an attorney, suggested to the board that the plan would be vulnerable to legal action unless legal consideration were given to a K-5 as well as a K-6 plan. The district's counsel advised that the board would indeed be vulnerable to a suit if it did not go through the entire planning process to consider the K-5 option. At the instigation of several citizens, additional advice was sought including a widely recognized regional authority on EIS procedures to offer a contrary view. Testimony indicated that the district could consider the K-5 option through the EIS, a process intended to give decisionmakers additional information about alternatives. If the district used this approach, the planning process would not have to be a separate operation but would be incorporated throughout the

EIS process into the time schedule already set for the decision. However, the board was convinced by its counsel that the risk of a suit was serious enough that they should take the conservative approach of a full-fledged K-5 planning process.

Further complicating the situation was the fact that the composition of the board had changed in the November 1979 elections. Three board members had called for development of an alternative K-5 plan in the fall of 1979, but were outvoted. The election, however, brought one new member to the board. Five hours after the new member was sworn in on January 3, 1980, the newly constituted board voted four to two to direct the superintendent to prepare an alternative long-range facilities plan based on a K-5 configuration. The superintendent reminded the board that the present plan had been based on board guidelines calling for a standard K-6 design, and had already absorbed 20 months of staff and citizen effort with two rounds of public hearings. Some observers have suggested that the superintendent's decision to resign from his post effective June 1981 was precipitated by his frustration with the board and their failure to adopt the original facilities plan.

Instead, the board decided to defer a decision on the long-range facilities plan until this mandated planning exercise was completed -- as it turned out almost a year later. The board's unwillingness to act in March 1980 not only angered the superintendent, it dismayed the DPC and other citizen activists. They saw months of work, a growing momentum for action, and hard-earned agreement on a modest, phased-in facilities plan threatened by a year's delay. The K-5 issue which caused the delay was at heart a desegregation issue.

Conflict over Seattle's desegregation plan, particularly its implementation, played a crucial role in this latest snag in facilities planning. For several years the board and district staff had see sawed back and forth with

first facilities planning being deferred while the desegregation plan was being put in place, and then changes in the desegregation efforts being held while facilities planning was going on. There appeared to be an inability both in concept and technically for the district to integrate facilities and desegregation planning into a coherent whole. Both planning efforts had been carried on independently on separate tracks. When board members asked staff to advise them on how the superintendent's recommendations would affect the racial mix of schools, staff maintained it was almost impossible to predict because the facilities plan contained so many options and possible combinations of outcomes.

Desegregation had preempted the attention and emotions of policymakers and administrators to the point that it had been difficult to focus on facilities issues and the connection between the two activities. During this period many educational and management decisions facing the district were seen through the filter of their impact on desegregation.

1981: The Board Finally Adopts a Facilities Plan. During the period following the board's decision in March 1980, staff developed an EIS for schools which might be closed under either K-5 or K-6 plans as well as other citizen-developed plans. It should be noted that while the superintendent maintained that K-5 and K-6 simply represented alternative housing plans, some parent advocates argued the merits of their preferred plan on education and/or social grounds. The three-year middle school purportedly could offer a wider range of educational options and longer enrollment tenure (thus stability); the two-year junior high would insulate sixth graders from the young adolescent seventh and eighth graders. Even more crucial to most parents, however, was the desire to retain the system they currently had in order to minimize disruption of assignments and programs for students.

Throughout the summer and fall of 1980, board and staff were kept busy with

the preparation of the alternative plans and the cumbersome EIS process. This process required the incorporation of responses to criticisms raised in a series of public hearings as well as written critiques of the plan. There were 155 written commentaries, many of them sophisticated and detailed, questioning various aspects of the EIS; 106 individuals testified at EIS hearings in January 1981 alone.

There were still strongly expressed doubts about the adequacy of district information, particularly concerning the options presented for board consideration. In addition to the staff plan and one submitted by a board member, a citizen activist had prepared a comprehensive proposal that integrated a phased-in implementation plan for both facility closure and desegregation. Protests were lodged with the district when the draft EIS was distributed in December 1980 because there had not been adequate analysis of these alternative plans.

While planning continued, the district's financial situation was worsening. Negotiations between the Seattle Teachers Association (STA) and the district resulted in a two-year contract with a 9% increase the first year and a 12% increase the following year, Although the state had assumed "full funding" for basic education, many costs were not being met. In addition, the state had limited the amount it would pay for salary increases according to a sliding formula that was working toward a statewide equalization of salaries. Seattle had been allowed a 4% increase for teachers, and therefore had to look elsewhere for the amount paid above the limit. The 10% lid on locally raised special levies had a grandfather clause that gave Seattle a certain leeway in negotiations, but the current contract put the district in a very tight bind. The hard-fought negotiations that gave the teachers higher increases than allowed by the state were reflective of a continuing deterioration in district/union relations. Ironically, the massive closure recommendation contained in

the superintendent's final report provoked strong attacks from the STA because closure of so many buildings would cause some teacher layoffs and the need for extensive staff movement.

The superintendent pointed to the agreement and, stating his desire to minimize program cuts, used the contract provisions as the primary rationale for recommending many more closures than he had in 1979, with a rapidly speeded-up implementation plan. He estimated that $5 to $7 million dollars might be saved by closing schools. After extensive questioning of the term "savings," he later referred to "cost avoidance."

When the superintendent made his final recommendations to the board, backed by the harsh realities of the recently negotiated teacher contract, citizens were disheartened. They were struck again at the high cost of the board's delay in 1980. The greatest concerns of citywide groups were the number of closures, the lack of a realistic implementation schedule and the precipitous disruption staff and students would experience with the closure of so many buildings at one time. They were frustrated because the major recommendation of the July 1980 Moss Report had not yet been implemented -- the district still did not have a property manager.

The superintendent left little to chance this time; he conferred closely with board members in an attempt to fashion a recommendation that would win board acceptance. In addition to the massive closure plan, he also recommended a compromise to the continuing K-5/K-6 controversy. Despite an earlier firm position that a standard grade configuration was an essential prerequisite to implementation of desegregation plans, the final recommendation allowed grades to conform with existing patterns, and with what were perceived as the predominant wishes of residents in the respective areas.

It was probably no coincidence that the board received a budget briefing the night before the February 11 meeting when they were to vote on the new

facilities plan. The budget report suggested that the district would face a $5 to $6 million deficit for the next year even if it approved the superintendent's closure plan.

On February 11, the board adopted the superintendent's recommendations to close two high schools, one middle school and eleven elementary schools in summer 1981. Three additional buildings housing special programs and four more schools would also be closed in 1982. Citizen leaders were discouraged and felt their efforts had been valueless. When the late night meeting ended, it was clear that two crucial questions had to be addressed. How could the district prepare and move hundreds of students and staff from closed buildings to their new schools? And what was going to happen to 1.3 million square feet of space that would be vacant all at once come June?

This last round of the closure debate had brought into focus changes in citizen response. It clearly pointed up important philosophical and strategic differences between the district and the citizen organizations. In addition to an even more finely honed use of political pressure, citizens were taking the initiative in two important ways. First, they were no longer merely protesting closures. Instead, they were offering carefully thought-out and researched alternatives to district proposals. They often surpassed district staff in doing their homework especially in terms of innovative uses of excess school space in other parts of the country. They persisted in asserting the feasibility of joint use and short- and long-term leasing of excess space. Board and administration had maintained during much of the early debate that it was impossible for the district to lease space profitably and that there were too many legal, financial and technical barriers standing in the way of joint use or reuse.

Second, increasingly the citizen perspective was framing the debate. For

years, the issue had been confined to whether a school (or schools) should be closed. By 1979, citizens were insisting that district attention be focused on the broader policy and administrative issues of property management. They were asking how all district property could be prudently managed for maximum educational and community benefit. Their point of view was derived from an attitude about school buildings as public facilities. Citizens saw buildings as a community resource susceptible to a variety of other uses other than the traditional one of providing a place for school activities.

The district tended to see excess space as an increasing liability in the face of declining enrollment. The major thrust was to get that space off their hands as quickly as possible. For the citizen groups, however, declining enrollment presented an opportunity for rethinking the use of public facilities. They recognized that many public and private agencies would be feeling the impact of cut back. Excess space could be seen as a valuable public resource that could be used to provide a better variety of services.

For the district, that same space presented a problem -- an immediate problem of retrenchment.

A Year Later

Almost a year has passed since the board made its decision on closures. A property manager was hired in April 1981 to begin implementing the newly adopted policies of the board in regard to joint use, and short- and long-term reuse. By that time, the district had decided which schools should be kept open for its educational program (available for joint use): which should be closed but retained for potential use again as a school (available for short-term lease); and which should be closed permanently as schools (available for sale or long-term lease).

Of the fourteen schools closed in June 1981, only three are still "closed"

buildings without some kind of occupancy. Of these, one is under consideration as a community center and negotiations are underway to lease a second to a local university on a long-term basis. The third, one of the high schools, is still closed with no immediate prospects for continued use of the building, although the gym is used by community groups. The other facilities have been leased to entities that have taken over responsibility for building management (including tenant selection and services) with on-site managers. These once-closed buildings now house a variety of activities including health clinics, sheltered workshop, law firms, and community centers. The return on the buildings varies but in all cases covers the cost of maintenance of the facility. In looking toward long term leases, the district projects that in the case of Jefferson school with an appraised value of $1.3 million, the district will recapture $1.7 million over the first ten years, at least $2.5 million over the next ten years, and $4.3 million over the following ten years.

In terms of the other primary concern -- management of student movement -- the story is not so bright. The receiving schools for the two closed high schools are now suffering from overcrowding. Portables have been brought on to school grounds to hold the overflow. Franklin, one of the receiving schools, has exploded from the smallest high school in the district (800 students) to one of the largest with 1800 students. The stress and strain integrating 1000 new students into a school that had already been plagued with racial tensions and conflict has had a serious impact on discipline and morale. The district administration appeared to assume the major shifts in students and staff were primarily technical problems of placement. It appeared to underestimate the capacity it needed to manage the sensitive movement of so many students and staff at one time when every school in the district was affected.

The Seattle Experience

In tracing the history of school closures in Seattle during the last ten years, we see three phases of activity. Traditionally, and up until 1974, the district perceived its primary responsibilities as determining the number of students to be served, the amount of space available, and the physical condition of facilities. Both board and administration saw their decisions as primarily dependent on technical criteria and as relatively self-contained in impact. There appeared little need to consult with affected neighborhoods or the city if the building were being considered for closure.

Forty-one schools had been closed in the district between 1883 and 1973. On occasion there had been vigorous neighborhood outcry at the loss of a school but the board had not backed down. The sense of outrage had never extended to a community-wide concern for the effects of closure on the city. There had been no public questioning of process or criteria used by the district. In 1974, this independence was brought to an abrupt halt when strong and effective citizen protest met the district's decision to close seven schools. Citizens at this point began to realize the power they could muster by developing their own information for use by community advocates. They also found that neighborhood and citywide political pressure could be very effective in bringing decision-making to a grinding halt.

In the period from 1974 through 1978, the district made another abortive effort at large-scale closure but citizen-inspired court action again forced them into a holding pattern. During this time when the district was studying the issue from various perspectives, the school closure controversy was complicated by the impact of desegregation. There was no cool, objective way of talking about moving young people from closed buildings when the issue of student movement was interwoven with the process of desegrating schools.

In 1978-79 it became clear to everyone that action was going to be takem and that schools were going to be closed. But it was during this third phase that a change in the citizen response to district action became apparent. Members of the DPC and other citizen organizations began to look for alternatives to boarding up or selling surplus school buildings. They explored the possibilities that joint use allowed for maintaining smaller schools with supplemental income from paying tenants, and the range of options for short- and long-term leasing. Their technical and political sophistication grew. The implications of having middle class families in the public school system now became clear. The range of expertise and political access among the citizen activists was impressive. Given five minutes' notice they could pull together a political coalition or an array of expert witnesses on such subjects as demographics, Washington state law, urban planning and economics to testify before a school board hearing. Another strength middle class parents brought was the ability to volunteer hours, days, months of time to develop or change school district policy.

In those late hours of February 11, it appeared as though the strong citizen effort had failed. The district closed a large number of schools in a very short time, although it appeared clear there was not the capacity to manage either the movement of students and staff or the million plus square feet of property in a profitable, publicly acceptable fashion.

As we have pointed out, the movement of students was accompanied by disruption to the system. However, even the district's harshest critics cannot help but be impressed by the record established in less than a year of property management. This appears due to three factors. First, the city's willingness to cooperate in providing flexibility in its zoning ordinance has made the district and community's task possible. Second, the caliber and the imagination

of the individual chosen to manage the district's property has been essential to the program's success. Third, the apparent "loss" suffered by citizens on February 11 had been preceded by a marked change in the board and staff's attitudes towards school closure. Despite continuing disagreements, citizens and staff had persisted in their attempts to influence and understand each other. The district now is approaching the property issue in a new way. The results speak well of the working relationships that developed between staff and community during the extended period of debate. An added benefit is the presence in Seattle of a large group of knowledgeable, experienced citizens who actively support the public school system.

In retrospect there was a kind of luxury to this debate over closures in Seattle. During the ten years under discussion, citizen intervention had often played a part in paralyzing swift, decisive action by the district. But during the ten years, some short-sighted actions were prevented and the protagonists learned to work together. The luxury was due in part to the relatively mild nature of the cutbacks. One can hope that Seattle -- both its school system and its public -- learned valuable lessons about the role of public dialogue and of persistent attention to improving the system. This may prove particularly important as the schools and the city move into a period that will be scored by far deeper cuts and greater constraints.

Lessons for Other Districts

We recognize the considerable variation that exists among districts in terms of structure, community needs and expectations, financial constraints, and political relationships. However, we believe other districts can profit from the Seattle experience.

A first recommendation is the advantage gained by taking a long-range view of future educational and facility needs. This requires broadening considerations

beyond school closure to include overall management and development of district property. Two factors support this approach. First, a district stands to gain if its resources can be managed to yield return either financially or in terms of exchanged services. Second, by developing a long-term strategic approach to the use of property, a district can maintain maximum flexibility to meet future needs. With uncertain enrollment projections and demographic shifts, districts need to have the capacity over time to move facilities in and out of educational use.

A second point is the importance of involving other jurisdictions and the private sector in long-term planning for facilities use. Schools may have excess space that can be used by city government to site community centers, libraries, senior citizen centers, park and recreational facilities, or public health clinics. All jurisdictions are being forced to cut back and public resources, whether space or service, can be better coordinated. Leasing by private agencies or commercial tenants can provide another source of income for the district.

A final general recommendation concerns the way communities participate in the issue of closure. Early involvement in planning, particularly at the local school level, is essential. Communities can be given advance warning if their school is vulnerable because of declining enrollment or deteriorating condition. Given time, community members can work with the district, city, and neighborhood businesses and organizations to develop ways to increase enrollment through program improvement and expand building use through the addition of other tenants. Where buildings have to be closed, early community understanding and involvement in deciding on reassignment options and facility use, can turn community energy away from protests toward development of equitable, reasonable solutions.

We recommend that districts facing enrollment decline consider developing a specific set of policy and management guidelines before making cut back decisions. Policymakers might consider among other issues: existing educational and desegregation policies in order to avoid conflict; whether the district should retain surplus property; whether it will lease property; what is the range of options (i.e., joint use, short- and long-term reuse) it will consider; what are appropriate uses for excess school space; how will the revenues from leasing be used; will the district have a sliding lease scale according to the kind of tenant; whether it should accept supplementary services from agencies in exchange for use of space; how should the management function be carried out.

In terms of management, districts should develop capacity to gather and analyze the short-term and long-term consequences of facilities decisions. Managers need: a working knowledge of legal constraints pertaining to property; an inventory of excess space within district facilities; an inventory of space needs of other governmental jurisdictions, community agencies, private entities; a general picture of the local real estate market; an indicator of the marketability of excess space in school buildings; a review of housing options to be considered either by private developers or the city in terms of low income housing sites; determination of the level of cooperation by other jurisdictions and the private sector; information from communities facing potential closure about options for school retention or reuse; a comprehensive exploration of private sector willingness to invest in public schools; a comprehensive examination of extended use of all buildings by community education programs, vocational education, etc.

The relation between managers and policymakers is crucial. Administrative staff should be able to provide information that will help boards make policy on realistic, reasonable grounds. The flow of information should not paralyze

board members with too many options. Careful attention paid to the relationship between various in-housing planning constituents such as program, desegregation, facilities, and budget will help avoid separate track planning. Consultation with the city government and other jurisdictions is important. City efforts in the area of low income housing, for instance, can confound district plans for desegregation and school closure unless there has been continuing dialogue on impacts.

At the beginning of this report we state that educational decisionmakers do not always have the tools needed for facing decline. Administrators managing shrinking public systems can conceive new roles for themselves and can develop a new repertoire of skills to meet new demands. The clearest message is that schools must be improved with fewer resources. Communities, other governmental units and the private sector will play an increasingly important part in providing resources and shaping expectations for the school system. Political negotiations with these new actors in public school administration will take a growing amount of time and skill for any manager. He can no longer rely on a monopoly of technical expertise or a board largely susceptible to his influence. Boards today are subject to a growing barrage of special interest demands that make them vulnerable to a range of political pressures. Educational managers must help boards make good, reasonable decisions on the basis of consultation with affected parties, careful analysis of information that relates to policy, and on a workable mix of educational and political considerations.

Conflict and pressure are inescapable parts of any system undergoing change. When the change involves cutting back, managers can expect their jobs to become more complicated and demanding. Educational administrators will need to develop a new set of management tools to help them -- and more importantly their school districts -- survive the deeper cuts that are coming.

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